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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR. JOINT STAFF  
FOR LTGEN SELVA, JERUSALEM PASS AMB. HALE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/13/2019

TAGS: PREL KWBG IS

SUBJECT: CABINET APPROVES NEW MAP OF PRIORITY ZONES THAT  
INCLUDES WEST BANK SETTLEMENTS

REF: A. TEL AVIV 2686

1B. TEL AVIV 2707

Classified By: A/DCM Marc Sievers for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(U) On Sunday, December 13, after a five-hour debate, Israel's cabinet voted in favor of the new national priority areas map reported ref A. According to a December 14th Ha'aretz report, all of the ministers from the Likud, Yisrael Beiteinu and Shas parties voted in favor of the proposal, while all five Labor ministers opposed. Several Labor Ministers, including Minorities Minister Avishai Braverman and Social Affairs Minister Itzik Herzog had publicly condemned inclusion of West Bank settlements on the grounds that the move would undercut the GOI's credibility with the Palestinian Authority and violate the spirit of the High Court decision that more development funds should go to Arab-Israeli communities in the Galilee and the Negev.

12. (U) According to PM Netanyahu's officially released statement to the cabinet, many West Bank settlements were included in this revised National Priority Area map because of the level of security threat these selected settlements face, and "to provide tangible aid to those who bear the security burden every day." Specifically, the Cabinet Communiqu backgrounder explains, "the Israeli government sees strategic importance in maintaining national strength and security, and therefore sees fit within its security goals to help strengthen local authorities/communities whose security is threatened by existing or anticipated threats." The settlements that are included in the plan either have a threat rating of three or four out of four, or are within seven kilometers of the Jordanian border (an extension of the border communities' inclusion within Green Line Israel), even though technically Israeli law does not apply to the West Bank.

13. (C) COMMENT: The inclusion of 110,000 West Bank settlers in the Development Plan may be intended to address the unexpectedly vehement reaction of the settlers to the announcement of a ten-month settlement construction freeze (see ref B). However, it is likely to reinforce the sense that the GOI is seeking to placate the settlers and may make it more difficult to deal with the settler movement in the future.

CUNNINGHAM